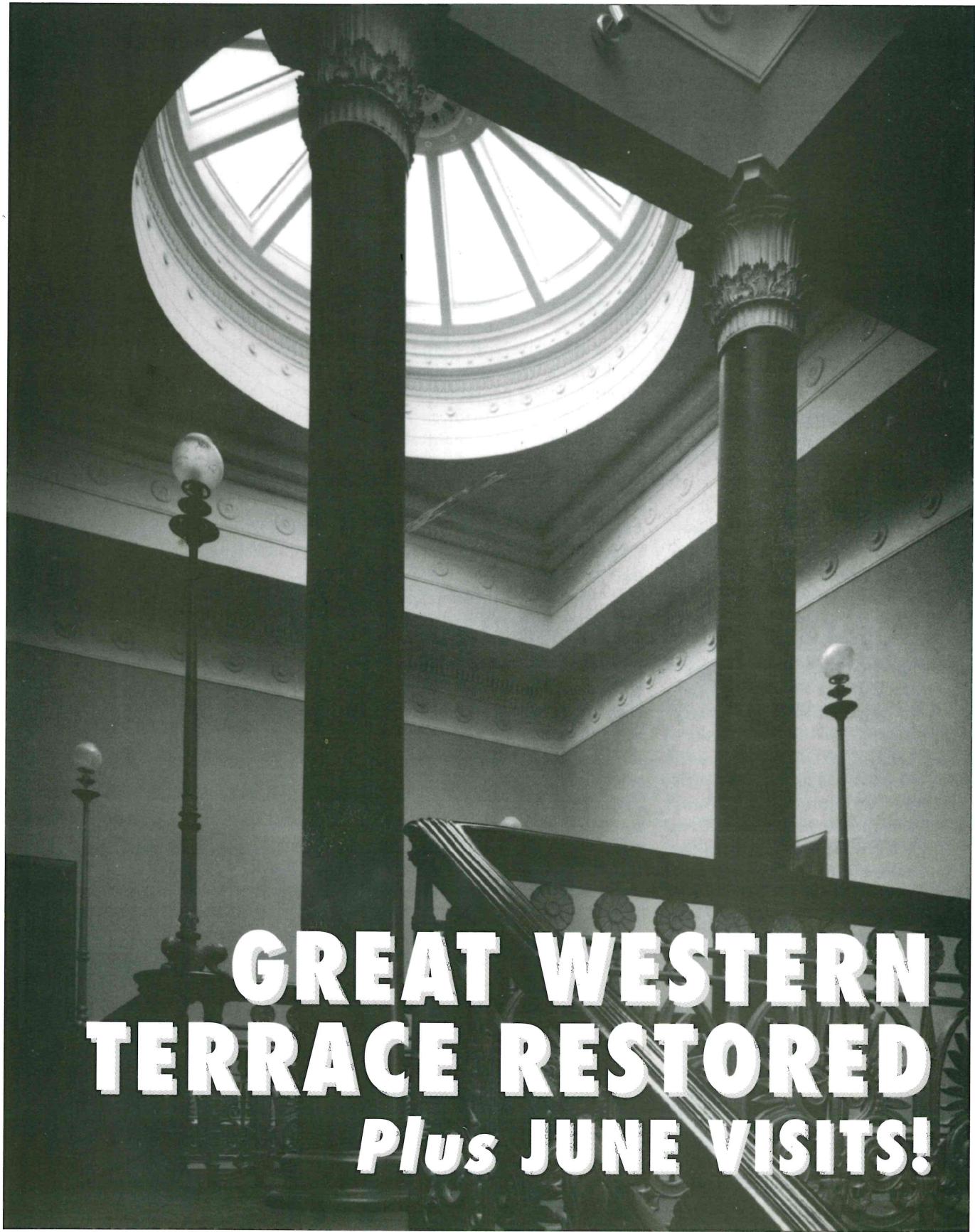


# The Alexander Thomson Society NEWSLETTER



Nº 13 MAY 1995



**GREAT WESTERN  
TERRACE RESTORED**  
*Plus JUNE VISITS!*

# CASES

## Nº4 Great Western Terrace

As reported in our last *Newsletter*, the restoration of this much-abused house has now been completed and both the large basement flat and the upper part of the house have now been sold. At a ceremony in the house on March 20th to mark the completion of this most encouraging rescue operation, John Sheridan of Classical House (Scotland) Ltd presented copies of a certain new book on 'Greek' Thomson to Graeme Munro, Chief Executive of Historic Scotland, and to Baillie Craig Robertson for Glasgow District Council to acknowledge the contribution made by both organisations. We hope to have our Annual General Meeting in No. 4 later this year.

On Page 6, Brian Park of Page & Park Architects describes the problems encountered in restoring this house.

## Glasgow Cross

Our concern about the deplorable condition of the beautiful warehouses street in Watson Street and Bell Street by Thomson and/or Turnbull [above right, and see *Newsletter* Nos. 7, 8 & 12] was fully justified. In March, having watched these buildings gently decay for decades, Glasgow's Department of Building Control served a dangerous structure notice on the block in Bell Street and a similar notice on the Watson Street block cannot be far behind. On learning this, we implored the City Council not to let this warehouse disappear but to take steps to ensure that it goes to a new owner who can begin the long overdue rehabilitation of these structures. There is no evidence to suggest that the iron-framed structure of the warehouses is basically unsound, or that the stone facades are insufficiently supported. These buildings can perfectly well be rehabilitated as flats or for a new commercial use and, as we have long argued, their rehabilitation is crucial to the necessary regeneration of Glasgow Cross.

The Watson Street block is owned by Mr Barry Clapham, a developer;



the immediately-threatened Bell Street block was owned by a business which has gone bankrupt and is now for sale. We were greatly encouraged to know that Messrs Classical House were taking an interest in the building, but then it emerged that there was another potential purchaser. Missives have now been exchanged but the identity of the interested party remains secret. However, we are pleased to know that the City's Planning Department, backed by Historic Scotland, is most anxious to impress on any purchaser of the warehouse that the obligations of owning a listed building will be strongly enforced and that immediate clearance of the site will not be tolerated.

What we find intolerable is that the future of these important buildings should be jeopardised by inertia and secrecy, but we applaud the recent efforts of the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust (whose office is close by in the High Street) and the Planning Department to solve this long-running conservation scandal.

## Castlehill, 212 Nithsdale Road

The scandalously cavalier treatment of this villa by Thomson was reported in our last *Newsletter*. Fortunately, the Planning Department has leaned heavily on the owner and his wretched (Edinburgh) architect with the result that we received notice of a new planning application for the

house in April. We were pleased to find that this involves the restoration of the original plan of the house as a single unit. We have therefore approved this application but stated that, given the amount of trouble we have all been caused in this case, it would not be unreasonable for the full restoration of the decorative wooden gable ends to be a requirement of planning permission and listed building consent. We shall see.

## Caledonia Road Church

The Historic Buildings Trust (of London) has now published a consultative document entitled *An Outline Proposal to Save the Caledonia Road Church, Gorbals, Glasgow*. This we fully support.

As outlined in our last *Newsletter*, the proposal is to swing the proposed Central Area Link dual-carriageway to the west of the church by demolishing the redundant railway viaduct. This would have many environmental advantages in addition to allowing restoration of the church and its proper integration into a new Crown Street redevelopment. Furthermore, a parcel of land behind the church would be freed for an enabling development and the contiguous facades of Thomson's Cathcart Road and Hospital Street tenements could be recreated and the original line of Hospital Street restored.

The document argues that the way forward is:

"1. The Historic Buildings Trust enter into an option agreement with the City Council on a short term lease for all land necessary to achieve the restoration of the church. Concurrently The Historic Buildings Trust to enter into a similar partnership with British Rail, although outright ownership of the land by the City Council may also be a necessary pre-requisite to this process.

"2. The City Council will transfer to the Road Department land to achieve The Historic Buildings Trust's proposed realignment of the dual-carriageway Central Area Link to the west of the Church.

"3. Roads Department to raise funds for Central Area Link and proceed with design for western route... Planning permission would therefore have to be sought for The Historic Buildings Trust proposed route.

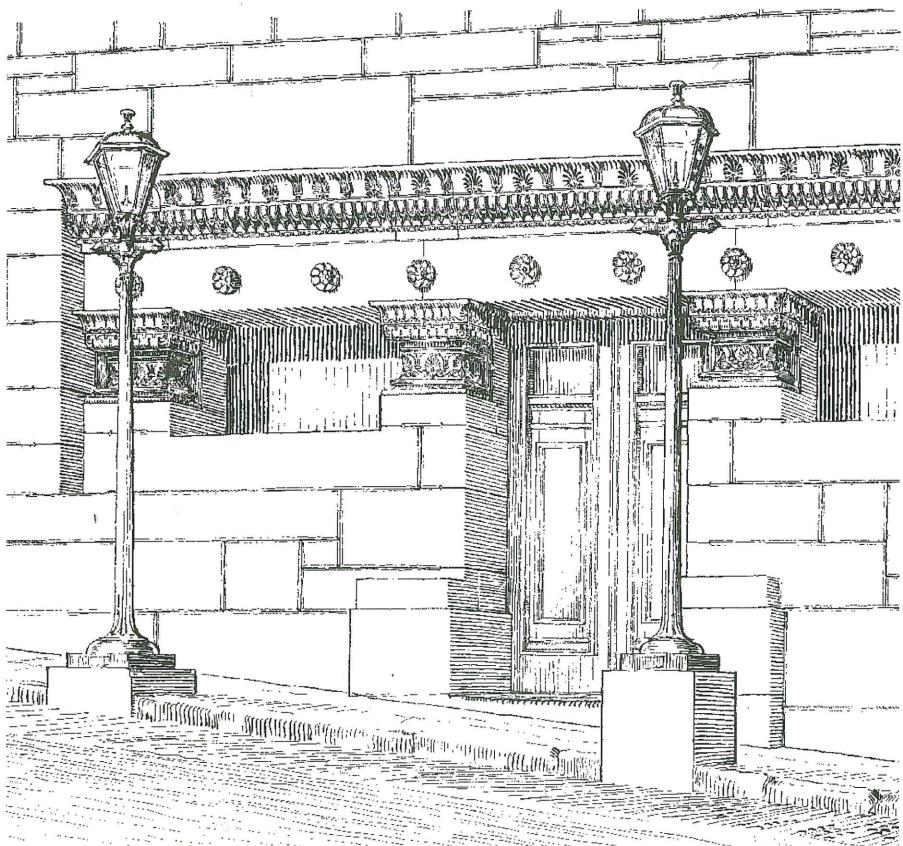
"4. The Historic Buildings Trust, working in partnership with the Council, will seek partners/end users for Church and associated land.

"5. The Historic Buildings Trust to continue to progress project as a whole until partners identified.

"To conclude: The opportunity to undertake this ambitious scheme is here and now and should not be wasted.

"Essentially there is a window of opportunity to address the numerous problems that this site has posed over the past 30 years..."

We agree, and we hope that the relevant authorities will take this imaginative proposal seriously and so end the deadlock which has doomed the Caledonia Road Church to moulder away as a ruin for three decades. So far the Trust has received positive responses. The trouble is that Strathclyde's Roads Department is currently seeking funds to carry out the existing (and damaging) road proposal on the east side of the church. With 1999 in the offing, we hope the Roads Department may reconsider and grasp this opportunity to do the right thing.



### St Vincent Street Church

Efforts to restore Thomson's one intact church were given a great boost by having the Annual Convention of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland in the building. And at the dinner in City Chambers, the President of the RIAS told the Lord Provost how much the Institution looked forward to seeing the church fully restored when the Convention returns to Glasgow in the *annus mirabilis* 1999...

Adapting the building for the Convention involved the erection of temporary scaffolding and the creation of permanent new lavatories (in a vaguely Thomsonian style) in the corridor behind the organ screen. This work was carried out by Glasgow's Department of Architecture and Related Services.

While it was exciting and cheering to have some seven or eight hundred architects filling the church for the Convention's principal session on Friday, May 5th, the building is not, of course, ideal for such an event because of the difficulty of showing slides. The contribution of

Strathclyde Regional Council was, therefore, to black out the building and delegates admired the imaginative and sophisticated manner in which this was achieved by fixing black bin-liners over the windows with sticky-tape. And, sure enough, when these were removed, some of the paintwork came away as well.

Thomson naturally loomed large at this event and we hope that foreign visitors were suitably impressed by his architecture. A party was held at Holmwood and the BBC's film on the church made for *One Foot in the Past* and starring your Chairman was shown to the Convention and, truth to say, elicited rapturous applause.

The drawing of the stupendous side entrance to the St Vincent Street Church in Pitt Street reproduced here was drawn by Andrew Rollo in 1897 and reveals that the door was originally flanked by lamp standards. Were these designed by Thomson? From the look of them, probably not. This drawing comes from a set of measured drawings of this entrance, inside and out, which are now at the National Monuments Record for Scotland.

# DEAR GEORGE...

THE FOURTH of the five letters Thomson wrote to his brother George in West Africa was, like the earlier letters, much concerned with financial matters and in particular with the income both brothers derived from their property in Gordon Street (*right*) — the Grosvenor Building.

1 Moray Place, Strathbungo  
Glasgow 17th Feby 1873

My Dear George

I received your letter of 21st and 25th Decr. on Tuesday last and the following day the Bills and Cash order amounting in all to £101-1-8 were presented and when they are paid it will leave £314-3-9 at your credit in the Bank. I send herewith an abstract statement of last half year's rents &c. showing a balance after paying all expenses of about £329-0-0 or after deducting Amelia's allowance £269-0-0. I suppose the only place that will be to let is Fleming Watson & Nairns — which I have told Mr. Frame to advertise as two shops but although several have looked at them they are not yet let. Wallace refuses to give any more rent this year but is willing to pay £10 more next year so that the place is let to him for two years at £60 and £70. Some change has taken place with Donaldson and Symington but Donaldson retakes the place for two years at an advance of £5-0-0 and is advertising part of it to let. Some time ago Mr. Findlay of Carslaw & Henderson called at the office and proposed to take Mr. Stark's premises into his own hands as he said he could not get the Starks to do as he required them. I was unwilling to interfere but he has since made a proposal to Robert Stark to take over the premises and plant and to engage him as manager with a salary and share of profits. When I last heard this arrangement was considered all but settled — but Robert Stark was laid up with cold. There will be no change to us. I am not sure whether I mentioned to you in a for-

MARTINMAS 1872  
abstract

T. & G. Frame - In account current with  
Messrs. A. & G. Thomson Co.

Property 68 to 80 Gordon Street

1872	2 Half years rental accts[?]			
Nov.				
11th	W.N.Gemmell & Coy.	35	-	-
	James Stark & Son	116	10	-
	Robert King	20	-	-
	Carslaw & Henderson	265	-	-
	Fleming Watson & Nairn	140	-	-
	Ingles & Wakefield	350	-	-
	Schmitz Bunten & Coy.	75	-	-
	Johnston & Frazer	115	-	-
	Wylie & Campbell	20	-	-
	Donaldson & Symington	35	-	-
	Wallace & Murray	30	-	-
		1201	10	-
1872				
Nov.				
11th	By Taxes	68	19	4
	Interest in Bonds	390	17	6
	Ground annual	344	3	4
	Tradesmen's accts.	40	14	11
	Insurance	10	-	-
	Sundries (including Alin A.T.s)	62	14	11
	Commission for Half year	15	-	-
		932	10	-
	Balance to be divided	269	-	-
		£ 1201	10	-

mer letter that one of the Bonds under the Mitchell's charge has been called up in consequence of the estate of which it formed a part requiring to be realized and divided but the heir to whom our loan fell was willing to let it remain on being satisfied that the security was sufficient. Young Thomas Binnie reported accordingly. I have not the particulars here but it was very favourable. The property was described as very substantial and the rents moderate. He valued the property after deducting the ground annual at about £26000. The accounts you left have been pretty well got in. There are still some standing over. Murdoch & Rodger's own accts I have not been

able to get neither have I got any from Anderson. I dont understand their ways of working. I am leaving a good large balance in Mr. Robertson's hands for you. Your share of rents at last term was £134-10 to which I added £15-10 and banked for you £150-. Business prospects are not very bright as in consequence of high prices things will be a good deal quieter this coming season still I have no reason to complain.

Your letters have been read with great interest by all sorts of people and I have been desired to send remembrances from far more than I can name. I think you should send some thing for the *Herald* occasionally it keeps friends here interested in

your scheme and I have no doubt that if you were asking for assistance it would readily be given — I have just been with Mr. Frame for the last two hours and we have let the east-most half of Fleming Watson & Nairn's place to Malcolm Ross & Coy. yarn merchants for five years at £175 — £175 — £200 — £200 — £200 — without any fittings or other expense except putting up a batten partition between the two places — and whilst we were there Thomas Hannah's son came to look at the remaining half for a sandwich shop. He is to think about it. Mr. Frame has sold all his property in Gordon St. & Mitchell St. to Houldsworth & Co. for seventeen years purchase. He was advising that we should sell ours. I told him that if we got an offer as good as his we would think of it. I suppose you would see by the papers that the Caledonian R Coy. purpose making a grand station between Union St. & Hope St & Argyle St. and Gordon Street. Many consider it a mere rouse but Leck has raised the price of the store opposite from £17 to £30 per yd. the other store which was altered has been sold to the R Coy. unconditionally and if they dont take it they pay the proprietors £5000. Some of the Kidstons and James Watson the mason have bought the property fronting the Broomielaw expecting to make a profit if the scheme is gone into. There has been some extraordinary sales made of late and I was told that John Bell was offered within a little of £74 a yd. for his prop. at the foot of Union Street. I called upon Charles Ingrame the gun maker to ask about Elephant shooting he said that a heavy double barrelled rifle was generally used for such purposes and showed me one which would cost £24-0-0 which he said with a lot of ornamental appendages was usually sold for £50 or £60 it could be used either with a round bullet or a shell which last he said with a breech loader was quite safe. I have left to Amelia to give you all general news and much of it of a very sad kind —



Poor Maggie — Mrs. Johnston — Robert Gardner John Blackie and others have to be added to the list of those who have gone since you left. Let us be thankful who are spared. Mr Carmichael leaves me today to begin for himself and Sandy Skirving intends beginning as soon as he is well enough. I enclose a letter from Bess. We are all well. Hoping that your health may be preserved I remain your ever affc. Bro.

A. Thomson

## NOTES

\* T. & G. Frame, accountants and local managers of the Royal Insurance Co., were in Royal Insurance Buildings, Royal Bank Place. Messrs Fleming Watson & Nairn were one of the occupants of the Grosvenor building, for which see below. Amelia was Thomson's sister.

\* "one of the Bonds under the Mitchell's charge..." Colin McKellar writes, 'The Mitchells will be the legal firm known variously as Mitchell

Allardice & Mitchell, Mitchells Cowan & Johnston and Mitchells Johnston & Co. Many of the Thomson papers which survive in the Strathclyde Regional Archive such as partnership records, will, inventory, etc., were lodged by Mitchells Johnston & Co. and the firm in its previous name donated £10.10.0d to the memorial fund. Earlier connections which can be documented are drawings for Mitchell Allardice & Mitchell dated 1859 and 1862 of Nos. 156 & 160 West George Street respectively, the feu contract for No. 1 Moray Place in 1861 and the purchase by two of the Mitchells of Nos. 1-7 Eton Terrace [Oakfield Avenue] in 1862. On the strength of this letter, the lawyers would seem to have been instrumental in the financing of the Gordon Street building.'

\* Thomas Binnie was a builder and property valuator whose home was The Knowe in Queen's Drive.

\* Thomas Hannah & Son, wine and spirit merchants, were at No. 11

*Continued on Page 11*

# Nº4 Great Western Terrace

## A Structural Conundrum

**N**EW CHAPTERS have recently been written about the work of Alexander Thomson however there are many observations yet to be made on the actual 'bricks and mortar'. We have recently had an opportunity to grapple with some of the idiosyncrasies of the construction of Nº 4 Great Western Terrace and this article concentrates on one particular aspect of that work.

### Background

Following years of neglect by private owners the property was acquired by Compulsory Purchase by Glasgow City Council to ensure the future integrity of the building and indeed the Terrace. The building was in such poor condition that the threat of demolition was not-too distant with all the implications which would have ensued for the Terrace as a whole.

Glasgow City Council had hoped that the property would then be taken on by The National Trust for Scotland, and indeed we undertook a building fabric condition and feasibility study on their behalf. Around the same time the issue of Holmwood arose and, as we now know, the Trust have been successful in acquiring this property after a long period of threat from development proposals.

The Trust were, understandably, unable to pursue the acquisition of two Thomson properties in the city and Glasgow City Council then approached various developers and trusts who had previously shown an interest in 4 Great Western Terrace. The result was an agreement between Glasgow City Council and Classical House that they act as developers of the project with grant assistance from the City Council and Historic Scotland.

Classical House are well known for their work with threatened listed buildings throughout the city and beyond (Aitkenhead House, Dalzell

House, John Neilson Institute, The Italian Centre) and were an appropriate firm to lead the project.

The project has now been completed resulting in a large self-contained flat on the lower ground floor with the main house being occupied by an enthusiastic and appreciative owner. Repair and conservation objectives were largely achieved within a tight timescale and budget constraints.

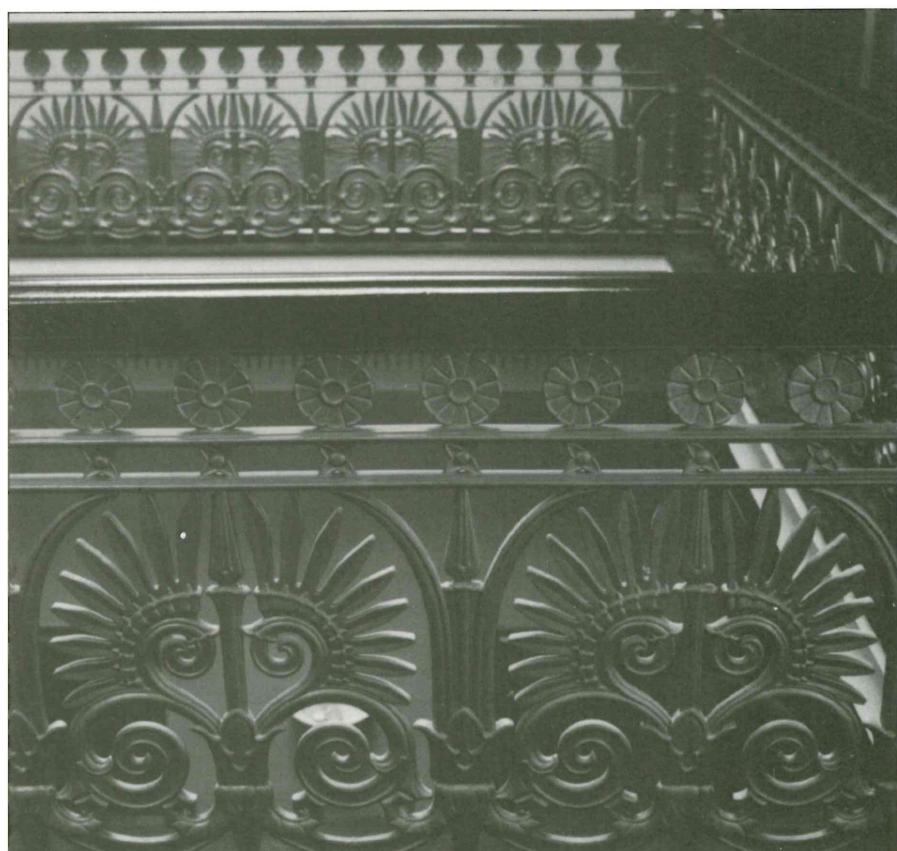
While certain areas have not been dealt with in such a thorough manner as we would have wished as a result, there was a careful prioritisation of resources respecting good conservation practice. Care was also taken in incorporating 'new' areas which are required within a large family house for the 1990s. This has ensured that the possibility of further specialist work being undertaken in future is not compromised and that elements which have been added are reversible without damage to the fabric and

integrity of the building.

### The Challenge

Dry rot, emanating primarily from roof defects, had advanced to the extent that determining what required to be propped in order to carry out repairs presented a series of puzzles for ourselves, the structural engineer and the contractor.

The decision was made to remove many of the architectural elements to ensure their integrity. These were labelled, removed and stored for future conservation, repair and reinstatement. This left a 'stripped' shell within which certain architectural features such as decorative plasterwork remained. The challenge was to interpret the structural and constructional logic of the building and to conserve and repair that structure while retaining as many of the integral architectural elements as possible.



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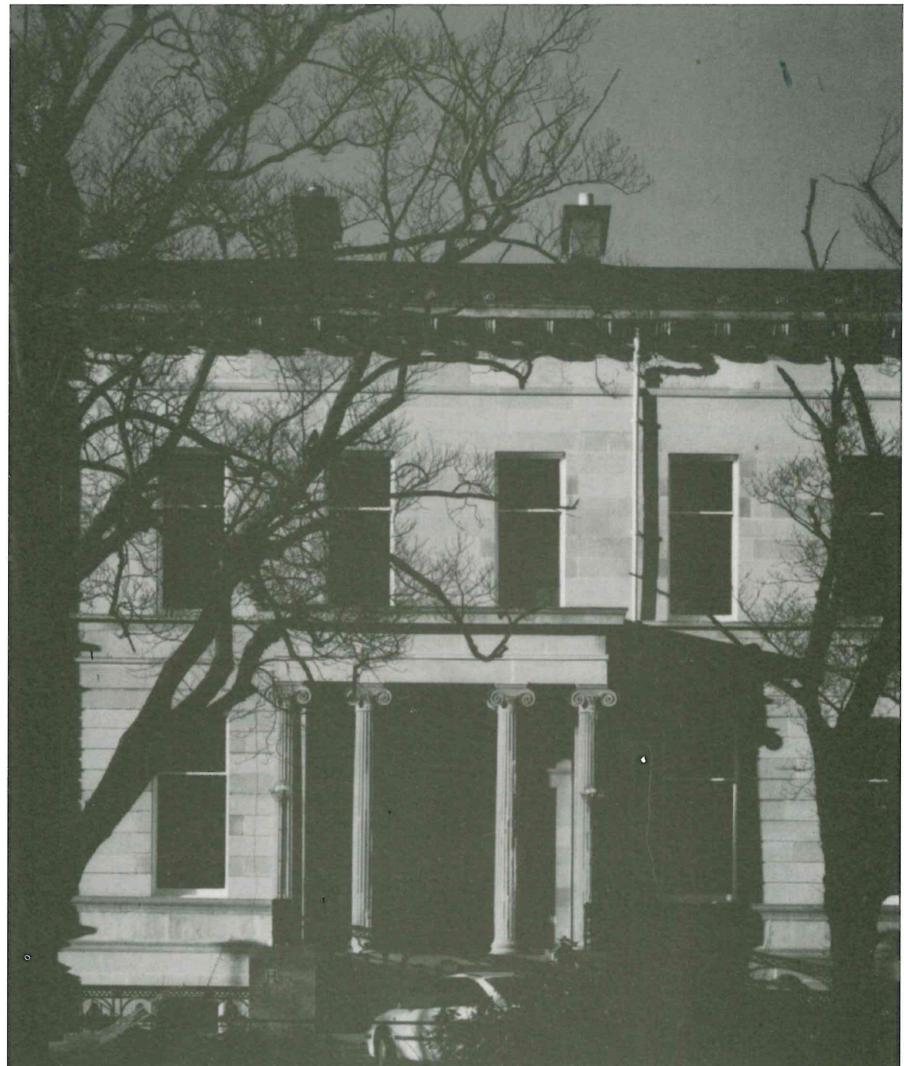
## The Problems

The roof has two ridges with a central valley complicated by the central circular cupola, an additional double pitched lantern over the stairs, 2 chimneys and a hipped roof over the rear bay window. The roof pitch, as on many Thomson properties, is below the recommended minimum pitch for slate in "sheltered" locations — the West of Scotland is considered "severe" for the purposes of these recommendations! The rafters have no tie members and no conventional ridge plate. Due to the shallow pitch of the roof, lack of ties and the weight of slates, all the ridges had a pronounced sag.

The front and rear eaves gutters were carved into the wall head stones and were lead-lined. The capacity of the rear gutter was totally inadequate for the roof area being drained and various additional *ad hoc* arrangements had been taken through the roof space. Due to the complicated plan shape of the rear wall and the inadequacy of the dished stone gutter to cope with the rainwater run-off, a kerb had been previously added to prevent water running down the rear wall. The two central valley gutters, serving half the roof area each, had a 50mm diameter outlet, which became easily blocked. Leaks in the valley gutters, internal pipes and roof glazing had developed while the rear gutter had backed up to allow water to run down the inside face of the rear wall.

As a result there were major dry rot outbreaks in the centre of the building and along the back wall. The composite nature of the construction, whereby timber stud partitions were carrying timber beams, in turn carrying further timber beams and joists and finally, the central cupola, resulted in major difficulties in analysing the approach to the structural aspects of the repair work.

Consequently, propping had to be taken from ground level to the roof



and ornate plasterwork had to be opened up. To the rear wall, rotten timber safe lintels had begun to compress with the load of the stonework. The rot in many of the joist ends was so advanced that there was no tie to the back wall. Subsequently it was revealed that the internal brick walls perpendicular to the back wall were not tied-in at all. Indeed one of these walls had an alarming gap all the way up, compounded by the presses built into the outside wall alongside. The ins and outs of the plan shape of the back-wall may well have helped to stiffen an otherwise decidedly unstable structure.

The spatial effect of the entrance hall and atrium is greatly reliant on the stepping profile towards the cupola and the setting back of the walls at first floor level to create the gallery. Again, this was achieved without regard for constructional practicality. The floors were badly deflected as a result of the eccentric loads from the walls. The beams taking the main loads of the cupola onto the brick flue walls had a bearing of only 50mm

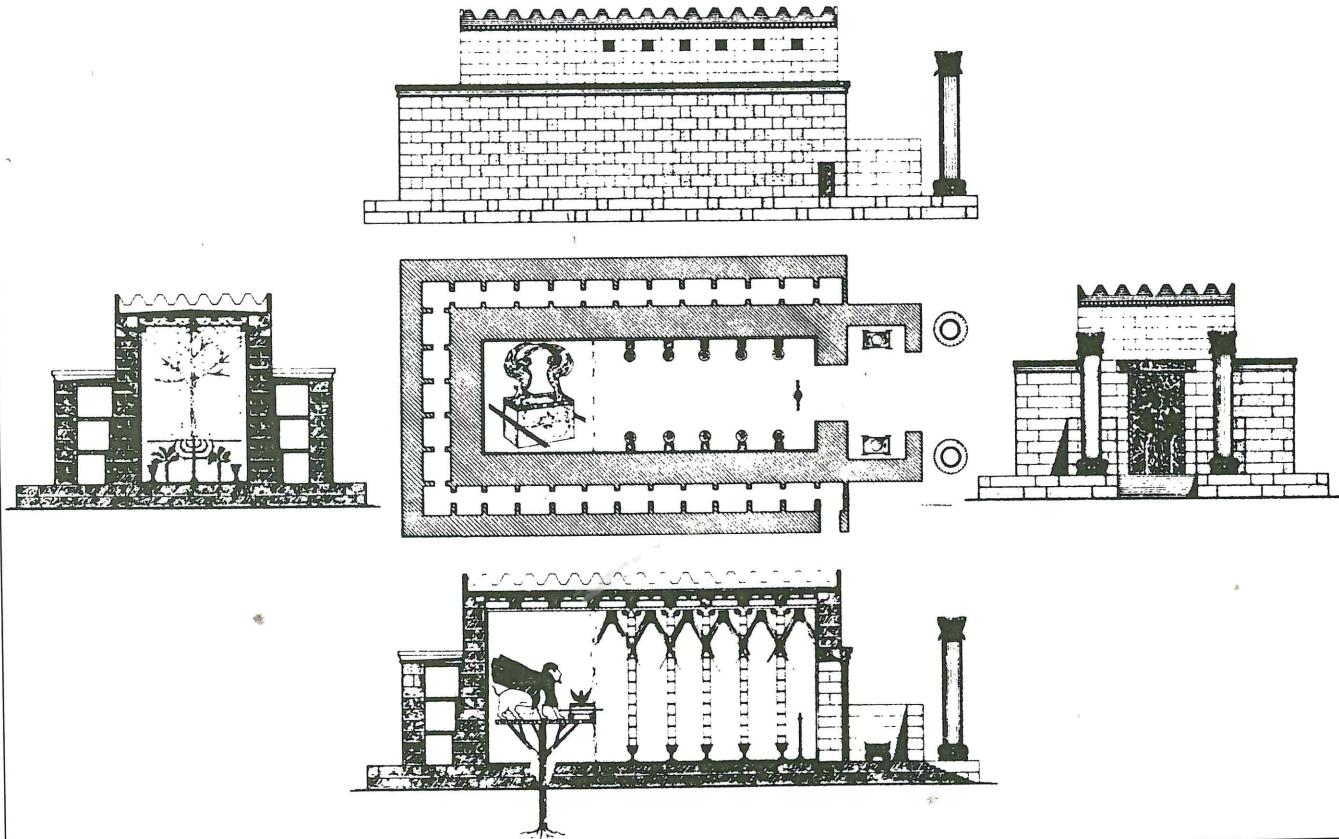
on the edge of the brickwork. A partition was built off flooring with no joist below and the stone entrance screen was built off a joist built-in lying on its side.

The furthest east column of the portico bears down onto the cracked lintel of the basement entrance door. The cantilevered stone staircase had no ties to the timber landing. The rear bay window stonework does not course in to the remainder of the back wall (inviting speculation that it may have been added). The colonnade at first floor level consisted of non-load-bearing timber post and plaster columns badly affected by rot to the extent that the timber core had almost disappeared leaving a hollow plaster shell. It was decided that in replacing these, the central column should act as a prop (perhaps verifying the relationship between form and function). Panels of very loose brickwork had been built off the beam above these columns, propping the load from the rafter ends at the valley gutter.

*Continued on Page 12*

# ST VINCENT STREET CHURCH AS SOLOMONIC POLEMIC: A Case of Submasonic Polemic?

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE  
Carmello Le Spine  
University of Illinois at Chicago, 1986



**SAM MCKINSTRY** continues the discussion about Thomson's St Vincent Street Church and Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

In Newsletter N° 12, James Stevens Curl took issue with my argument (in Newsletter N° 8) that there is no great affinity between Thomson's St Vincent Street Church and Solomon's Temple. He proposed that Thomson's great church is a mnemonic of the famous Biblical structure.

Since I wrote the piece in Newsletter N° 8, I have drawn attention (in Newsletter N° 11) to the relationship between the paired herm-busts at the tope of the St Vincent Street tower and the cherubim of the Tabernacle and the Temple. It seems to me that this is an obvious Old Testament ref-

erence. That should have made it clear that I am quite open to the possibility of minor references or resemblances to the Temple in St Vincent Street Church. What Professor Curl now argues, however, can hardly be described as minor: he proposes an integrated scheme of parallels, which I am inclined to reject, for the reasons set out below.

Professor Curl makes the point that Thomson's elevated "temples" at Caledonia Road, St Vincent Street and Queen's Park have "platforms", and that the idea may relate to popular illustrations of the Temple that were in circulation, including those of Lamy, or Fischer von Erlach, and which are featured in his book *The Art and Architecture of Freemasonry* (1991). Lamy's Temple is visionary, but the "platform" he fancifully illus-

trates (see *Newsletter N° 12*) is not a platform to the Temple proper, but to the Temple precincts. The same could be said of Von Erlach's classically influenced illustration.

The Temple was a complex: Thomson's churches are disparate buildings and their podiums are clearly Greek in inspiration. I would also argue that the platform on which St Vincent Street Church stands is an obvious response to the slope of the hill under it, and the need to provide a church hall; it needs no other justification. The platform at Caledonia Road is employed to articulate the church with the tenements to which it was joined and with the church halls. At Queen's Park, it seems to me that the platform is again an ingenious device for articulating the

*Continued on Page 10*

# A Note on the Thomson Family

**A** SLAB OF red sandstone in the graveyard of Balfron Parish Church holds the key to unscrambling part of the Thomson family tree.

My wife, who is a great-great-granddaughter of Alexander Thomson, and myself during the course of researches into the Thomson family history had been intrigued by the fact that no one in the immediate family seemed to know anything about the first wife of John Thomson (Alexander's father). McFadzean<sup>1</sup> states that "even his wife's name is unknown".

In the search for clues, we had gone to Balfron one wet Saturday only to find the local library closed. We explored the graveyard instead. Near to the church we found a flat slab of red sandstone on which were inscribed the words 'Thomson' and 'w Chr Glass'. Could this be the gravestone of Alexander Thomson's father and therefore also a clue to the identity of his first wife?

A search of the volume *Monumental Inscriptions for West Stirlingshire* held in Dumbarton Public Library revealed that the original inscription (at least as far as it was legible in 1970 when the record was taken) was

John Thomson, 21. 4. 1827, 66, w.  
Chr Glass, 18. 4. 1798, 36.

The stone is described as '44, red sandstone FS (flat stone)'. If this does indeed refer to Alexander Thomson's father then the date 1827 does not agree with that given by J.E.H..

Thomson in his *Memoir of George Thomson*<sup>2</sup> for the date of the Thomson family's removal to the outskirts of Glasgow. He states that 'In 1824, Mr. Thomson died and in the following year, the younger portion of the family, with their mother, left Balfron for Glasgow.' Perhaps by 1970 the '4' had become so eroded that it was mistaken for a '7'. It is certainly very difficult to decipher today.

With this clue, and the knowledge that John Thomson had worked in the Carron Iron Works, a search was

made of the Old Parish Registers in Falkirk District Library. Those for Larbert contain the following record,

'Decr 8th, 1781, John Thomson & Christian Glass both in this parish, gave up their names for proclamation'.

The registers also contains records of children born to the couple, e.g.

'Nov 10th 1782, John Thomson born to John Thomson and Christian Glass'

and

'July 18th 1784, Michael Thomson born to John Thomson and Christian Glass'.

This was good evidence that we were on the right track as family records and the *Memoir of George Thomson* record that John and Michael were the first two children of Alexander Thomson's father.

The crucial evidence was found when the corresponding registers for Balfron were searched in Dumbarton District Library. Among others, these for Balfron 1794 record that

'James, lawful son of Mr. John Thomson, Clerk at Ballindalloch Cotton Work and Christian Glass his spouse was born the 8th and baptised the 21st of Oct. 1794'.

Since we knew of John Thomson's occupation, this confirmed that John Thomson's first wife was indeed Christian Glass and that the family must have moved from Larbert to

*Continued on Page 12*

## EVENTS

### EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

As reported in the last *Newsletter*, the annual exhibition at the RIAS's headquarters in Rutland Square which coincides with the Edinburgh Festival is this year to be devoted to our hero. Entitled, *Alexander 'Greek' Thomson: Scotland's most original Classicist*, it will consist largely of photographs and be organised by Mark Baines and Gavin Stamp. The exhibition opens on **August 15th**.

### NECROPOLIS VISIT

In response to popular demand, Sandy Stoddart will repeat his guided tour of the monuments in the Necropolis — two, of course, being by Thomson. Meet at the entrance lodge by the Cathedral at 6.00 p.m. on **Thursday, 15th June**.

### ETON TERRACE

A visit what was originally called Eton Terrace, Thomson's row of eight houses now known as N°s 41-53 Oakfield Avenue, Hillhead. Meet outside N° 41 Oakfield Avenue at 3.00 p.m. on **Sunday, 25th June**. We hope to be able to visit at least one of the interiors of this 1865 block.

### FOR SALE

An opportunity to live in one of the finest houses in Glasgow: the top flat in N° 1, Great Western Terrace is currently for sale. With the restoration of N° 4, of course, Great Western Terrace is bound to become the most desirable address in the city. For further details contact Dr Donald Barran on 0141 339 8462.

## Thomson Book Award

**T**he new book on 'Greek' Thomson edited by your Chairman and Hon. Treasurer and published by the Edinburgh University Press at a mere £35 has been honoured by the American Institute of Architects [AIA] in its 1995 International Book Awards programme.

The book has received the AIA's Citation for Excellence in

International Architecture Book Publishing and was chosen by a jury chaired by Philip Johnson. Mr Johnson, of course, although he has never visited Glasgow, would know about Thomson through his friend the late Henry Russell Hitchcock; besides, with his devotion to Schinkel, he could not fail to admire Thomson.

# Solomon's Temple?

*Continued from Page 8*

church halls with the main auditorium, but it is also a means of providing the base layer of a pyramidal composition. Why re-interpret the obvious?

Next we come to the argument based on the numerology of Freemasonry. In particular, Professor Curl draws attention to the nine clerestory windows of the main auditorium at St Vincent Street, interpreted as perfection (3+3+3). The main space of Solomon's Temple was in the form of a double cube, and I find that at Caledonia Road, also aligned with temples on grounds of its podium, there are fifteen clerestory lights. In fact, if we examine other aspects of the St Vincent Street Church, we find that, for example, there are six columns to the portico, eight windows in the south wall, and so on. We will discover that every number from one to ten is represented if we count the various architectural elements, outside and in. So why pick on the one example of nine?

As for the twin columns Jachin and Boaz, on the face of it this argument seems quite persuasive: two columns, one on either side of the St Vincent Street porch, and proof, through plans, that some of the ancient illustrators put the Jachin and Boaz inside the vestibule in their Temple reconstructions. On balance, I am disposed to doubt this, for several reasons. First, the Jachin and Boaz were to be seen as a pair, whether in the Biblical accounts of the Temple or even in the highly speculative plans drawn by those Professor Curl cites. At St Vincent Street, the two columns are not seen together — they are at opposite ends of the porch. In Solomon's Temple they were dominant; at St Vincent Street they are insignificant in size. I argue that the pair at St Vincent Street are there to support the upper floor, and as an introduction to the twin rows of sister columns on each side of the main auditorium.

I would also draw readers' attention to an academic paper entitled "The Pillars Jachin and Boaz" (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 58,

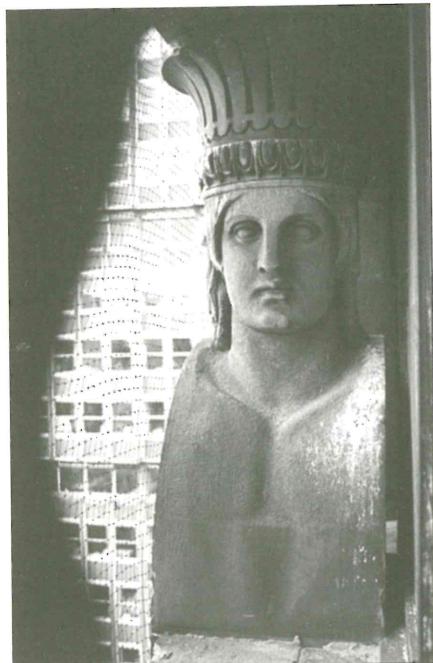


Photo: Gavin Stamp

pp 143-9), widely regarded as the most authoritative article recently written on the subject, and authored by R.B.Y. Scott. The paper takes as a basic proposition that "it is almost certain that they [Jachin and Boaz] were not a structural part of the Temple proper, but stood apart on either side of the Temple entrance". Very few, it seems, have seriously doubted the Biblical accounts in I Kings 7:15-22 and II Chronicles 3:15-17, which state this quite clearly. Scott also points to parallel examples of paired freestanding columns in contemporary pagan architecture. Alexander Thomson, in whose home the Bible was revered and regularly read, had no access to this research, but knew the Old Testament like the back of his hand. He would hardly be disposed to any unscriptural interpretation of the positioning and use of the columns. Not, it seems to me, would he ever suggest such prominent features by means of two widely separated and short, engaged pillars, however beautiful.

And what of my own argument, regarding the cherubim (*above*)? These were portable elements within the Tabernacle, and may simply have been intended at St Vincent Street to symbolise the temporality of earthly structures. That they might relate to the Temple is no greater a possibility.

In his conclusion, Professor Curl (tongue in cheek, I trust!) engages in a little emotional blackmail by suggesting that his scheme of elements is "a coded message for all to see and read if they can but open their eyes and minds". I regard it as no more than a mixture of faint possibilities and slightly tendentious speculation! His viewpoint seems to be predicated on the dubious basis that if Thomson was a Freemason (and which Victorian architect was not?), he must have studded his structures with secret masonic symbols. *Non sequitur*.

We must remember that Thomson was a devout evangelical Christian, and that, for him, the Temple and the Tabernacle, following the Epistle to the Hebrews, were structures that only dimly prefigured Christ and were superseded at the Incarnation. His church is above all else a Christian sanctuary, in essence a Presbyterian preaching box, where the Living Word was accessed through the written Word. The Holy of Holies, the heart and *raison d'être* of the Temple, was redundant, and is not found here. For what conceivable reason would a man like Thomson want to hark back to the Temple? Because he was in the Masons? I doubt it.

In conclusion, I repeat what I have said elsewhere. The most important thing that unites the church and the Temple is that they attempt, through architecture, to elevate the mind Godwards, but as the conjectural illustration provided here makes plain, there is precious little resemblance. Thomson did, of course, use historic architecture in an allusive and symbolic way, as he makes clear in his Haldane Lectures, which I interpret in my essay on Thomson's theory in *Greek Thomson*, but what he aimed at was a much more general effect than Professor Curl's thinking implies.

Incidentally, I have to say that I am quite impressed with Professor Curl's arguments regarding a symbolic/masonic interpretation of the plaster-work at 1 Moray Place, Thomson's home. This seems to me much more plausible.

# DEAR GEORGE...

*Continued from Page 5*

Drury Street. Their earlier address was No. 43 Gordon Street and the 'Thomas Hamble' referred to in the last Newsletter in Thomson's letter of 20th September, 1872, should have read 'Thomas Hannah'. Thomas Hannah's son did not take the Gordon Street shop.

\* Until Central Station was opened, the Caledonian Railway's terminus was at Bridge Street on the south side of the Clyde. To reach the city centre, the company had hoped to use the City of Glasgow Union Railway to the Dunlop Street terminus, subsequently extended to St Enoch, but was excluded because of its quarrel with the Glasgow & South Western Railway. In 1873, therefore, the Caledonian Railway (Gordon Street Glasgow Station) Act was passed which envisaged a high level railway bridge above a widened Jamaica Street road bridge. This scheme was dropped and two years later the company obtained powers for a new railway bridge 50 yards downstream. This was opened in 1878 and the original Central Station, squeezed between Union Street and Hope Street opened in December 1879. In front, directly opposite the Thomsons' Gordon Street building, a block of railway offices designed by Rowand Anderson were built which was subsequently converted into an hotel. This must have increased the value of the Grosvenor Building but by then both Thomson brothers were dead [see *Glasgow Stations* by Colin Johnston & John R. Hume, David & Charles, 1979].

\* Henry Leck was an accountant who dealt extensively in heritable property; his battles with the Caledonian Railway over compensation will be described in Thomson's final letter to be published in the next Newsletter.

\* John Bell & Sons, butchers, were at N°s. 170-172 Argyle Street and No.6 Union Street.

\* Charles Ingram, gunmaker & manufacturer of match rifles, was at No. 18b Renfield Street.

\* Robert Gardner was presumably the doctor mentioned in Thomson's

letter of 10th January, 1872. John Blackie junior (1805-1873) was the elder brother of both W.G.Blackie and Thomson's client Robert Blackie.

\* 'Mr Carmichael' is a mystery, but there was a John S. Carmichael established as an architect at 20g St Vincent Street in 1875. Alexander Skirling, Thomson's former chief assistant, whose time in London was described in Thomson's first letter to his brother [Newsletter No. 11] had returned to Glasgow.

\* The tenants of the Thomsons' Gordon Street property were:

W. N. Gemmell & Co., drysalters  
James Stark, calenderer & packer  
Robert King, merchant & commission merchant  
Carslaw & Henderson, muslin manufacturers  
Fleming Watson & Nairn, merchants & turkey red dyers  
Inglis & Wakefield, calico printers  
Schmitz Bunton & Co., wine merchants  
Johnston Fraser & Co., chandelier & gas fitting manufacturers  
Wyllie & Campbell, merchants  
William Donaldson, merchant  
Symington Armstrong & Co., shirt manufacturers commission agents  
Wallace & Murray, pulicate & Gingham manufacturers

We are most grateful to Colin D.R. McKellar for his research into the names and addresses mentioned in this letter and to Mrs Catherine Rentoul, Thomson's great-granddaughter, for permission to publish it.

## THE ALEXANDER THOMSON SOCIETY COMMITTEE

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# Nº 4 Great Western Terrace

*Continued from Page 7*

Given the advanced state of timber decay there can be little doubt that collapse of the roof of No. 4 was a real possibility. The rear wall was also inherently unstable, while at the front there was a sense of unease that the heavy cantilevered cornice was counterweighted by the roof loads. There was no evidence of any tying-in of the massive portico to the front wall. During indenting of stonework to the front wall, it was revealed that the backing material was almost dry-packed, raising some questions over the strength and behaviour of the front wall masonry.

## The Lessons

This lack of constructional and structural integrity and the resulting problems can be viewed from two different perspectives:

- a) 4 Great Western Terrace was a speculative development which set out to deceive — the monumentality is only "skin-deep"; or
- b) Thomson was dedicated to achieving grandeur even when constrained by cost parameters.

Another important lesson from the condition of 4 Great Western Terrace is an awareness of the spiral of decay which can result from relatively minor maintenance being neglected to the point where the structural integrity of a major terrace is at risk.

Perhaps Thomson's buildings convey such authority and strength that their endurance is taken for granted. This is far from the case and the surviving works must be tended carefully, if Great Western Terrace and Holmwood (with which we are now involved through The National Trust for Scotland) are typical.

Brian Park, Page & Park Architects

Client: Classical House Ltd  
Architects: Page & Park  
Structural Engineer: Ted Ruddock  
Quantity Surveyors: R M Neilson Partnership  
Lead Contractor: Shearer (Building Services) Ltd.

# The Thomson Family

*Continued from Page 9*

Balfron about 1793/4. Further searches of the Registers reveal that

Christian Glass bore eight children to John Thomson as follows:

Name	Date of Birth	Place of Birth
John	10.12.1782	Larbert (died 1810 in Vienna)
Michael	18.7.1784	Larbert
Janet (Jessie)	5.5.1786	Larbert (married Alexander Muir)
Christian	4.5.1788	Larbert (married Alexander Ritchie)
Elizabeth	24.5.1790	Larbert
Margaret	10.6.1792	Larbert
James	8.10.1794	Balfron (clerk in J. Finlay and Co.)
Helen	16.9.1797	Balfron (married James Parlane)

Christian Glass died aged 36, on 18.4.1798. Just over three years later, the Balfron Registers record that, on Oct 31st 1801:

'Thomson Mr. John and Miss Elizabeth Cooper both in this Parish, gave up their names for proclamation of Banns'.

The date for this marriage is therefore much earlier than had previously

been thought (McFadzean gives the date as probably between 1805 and 1808).

Miss Cooper had come to Balfron with her brother who was called to be the Minister of the Burgher Church in the village. By her, John Thomson had, according to the Parish registers, eleven children:

Name	Date of Birth
George	4.12.1802 (died young?)
William Cooper	11.1.1804 (died 1843)
Jane (Jean)	19.6.1805 (died 1828)
Adam	18.3.1807
Robert	17.?.1808
Andrew	16.2.1811
Ebeneezer	28.3.1814 (died 1847)
Amelia	14.5.1815
Alexander	9.4.1817
George	25.5.1819 (died 14.12.1878)
Elizabeth	7.1.1822

(J.E.H. Thomson, who was the son of Ebeneezer, states that this second marriage produced twelve children<sup>2</sup>).

The Parish Register entry for 'Greek' Thomson's birth is as follows, 'Thomson, Mr John, Clerk at the Ballindalloch Cotton works, and Elizabeth Cooper his spouse, had a son born the 9th and bap<sup>d</sup> the 17th April, named Alexander'.

This research was stimulated by a chance discovery in Balfron

Churchyard. It is ironic that the father has a permanent memorial and yet the more famous son has not.

## References

1. McFadzean, *The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
2. A *Memoir of George Thomson*, Rev. J. E. H. Thomson, Edinburgh, 1881.
- Dr. A. L. Macdonald, Helensburgh

## The Newsletter

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